

Testimony of Edward W. Munster March 19, 2010 regarding HB 5520, Section 19

I am here to speak in regard to Bill 5520 Section 19. Last year the legislature passed this bill and it was vetoed by the Governor. Section 19 was the subject of much anguish in the Town of Haddam because Town officials were not informed of the proposal. Once again the same land swap has been proposed without informing the towns except for the legal notice announcing this hearing. I do not object to the proposal but do object to the way DEP does its business. It is as though the citizens of the Town of Haddam do not matter.

If this were the only instance, I would not be here today. Let me give you three other examples within the recent past.

1. DEP and DOT encouraged the Valley Railroad Company to apply for \$15 million in federal TARP money being distributed by the TIGER Commission to run freight on the rail lines which run along the Connecticut River from Old Saybrook to Middletown. None of the town officials along the lower Connecticut River were contacted before this proposal was made to the Federal Government. All of Boards of Selectmen of the towns affected wrote letters in opposition to the proposal to the TIGER Commission. None of the conservation groups with interest in preserving the River were notified. Once these conservation groups were informed of the proposal they all wrote letters opposing the granting of these funds. Why doesn't DEP seek input from the Towns and the groups most affected rather than seek an advantage for a private for-profit corporation without people even knowing about it? One has to question the motives: why is DEP in pushing for freight on this defunct rail line which was purchased under the guise of a park for outdoor recreation.
2. A little over a year ago the Town of Haddam received a letter from the Parks Division of DEP effectively shutting down the Haddam Riverdays function at Haddam Meadows State Park. This one-day event for years brought citizens of our town to meet and enjoy activities together. All of the volunteer groups in town (Fire Department, Ambulance Society, Emergency Services, the Town Library, Garden Club, Historical Society, Land Trust and the list goes on) all had booths at which they informed citizens of what their groups do and raised funds for their groups. It was a great community event that was brought to a halt without the slightest attempt to explain why this was happening. Now they are reversing that decision without a word of explanation.
3. For years the Town of Haddam has been in discussions with DEP regarding our transfer station which is partially on State property east of the railroad tracks. DEP insists that the Town close the present transfer station but will not give the Town a permit to build a new state-of-the-art transfer station on adjacent land owned by the Town. Geological studies support the position that the best site for a transfer station is east of Route 154 where the sand bank is 80 to 100 feet thick rather than upland where deep fractures in the bedrock could lead to contamination of the aquifer serving the wells of countless families. In effect DEP is forcing the town unnecessarily into a capital expenditure of millions of dollars to place a transfer station in a geologically less desirable location. Or, the other alternative will force the town into curbside

pickup of garbage which will add \$400-500 cost to every family in town for years to come. Surely, if our Senator and Representative can support this land swap which benefits a few private individuals they should be able to use their office to assist the Town of Haddam with its transfer station issue with DEP. This would benefit all the residents of our town.

The reason for bringing these issues to your attention is to point out the unreasonableness of DEP ultimatums to our town. DEP appears to have its own private agenda and is not interested in the views or the needs of the citizens it is impacting. There is a common thread linking all four of these situations and that is the Connecticut Valley Railroad Company. All of these DEP actions advance the interests of the railroad to bring freight trains to run along the banks of the Connecticut River. *at the expense of the environment and the citizens DEP is expected to protect.* DEP needs to be reined in and made to be more responsive to the needs of our communities and our citizens.